

J4e
15

UNITED CHURCH
ARCHIVES

432.

Pam
LE
3

K849M23
1907

SIXTY YEARS' RETROSPECT



A LECTURE

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF KNOX COLLEGE ON THE
8TH OCTOBER, 1907

BY

WILLIAM MACLAREN, D.D., LL.D.

PRINCIPAL OF KNOX COLLEGE.

SIXTY YEARS' RETROSPECT.

In this land men have their eyes fixed so constantly on the future that they may for a while turn them with profit in the opposite direction.

And in view of my lengthened connection with this institution as student, supporter, professor and principal, you will pardon me when I ask you to join with me for a little in looking backward.

Sixty-three years have run their course since Knox College was founded, and sixty-one years have passed away since a young student commenced his studies within its walls, who now has the honour of addressing you from this platform.

It will not be deemed unseemly for him to indulge a little in retrospect.

The political outlook on this continent was very different sixty years ago from what it is now.

In the United States two diverse conceptions of Government were developing side by side. The north, with its democratic

ideal of human rights, and the South with its oligarchical conception of the right of the superior to rule the inferior, were steadily drifting towards conflict. Statesmen saw the danger and sought to keep the hostile elements within fixed limits. But there were moral elements involved in the struggle which no Mason and Dixon line could keep apart. In 1861 the inevitable conflict reached its crisis, and war swept away the peculiar institution of the South. By this sanguinary struggle the occasion of strife was removed and liberty was made the heritage of the slave, but bitter hatreds were engendered and difficult problems were left unsolved.

But notwithstanding these painful results, this terrible conflict has, we believe, done more to fuse into one the American people, from the borders of Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, than almost any other agency could have accomplished. And time, the great healer, and Christian feeling, will complete the work.

In our own country, changes, scarcely less important, have transpired. Ten years before the beginning of the period at which we are glancing, Upper and Lower Canada, as Ontario and Quebec were then called, were in the throes of a rebellion which might have ended in their separation from the British Empire, but which, happily, resulted only in the aboli-

tion of a form of government which should never have been imposed on a free people.

Upper and Lower Canada, three or four years after the rebellion of 1837-8, were persuaded to unite, but the union was not a success. Little comfort or peace came from that ill-assorted combination.

The Dominion, in which we now rejoice, was non-existent. The *disjecta membra* of provinces and territories, out of which it was ultimately formed, were scattered over the northern part of our continent, with almost no intercourse between them.

Now, for forty years these provinces and territories have been knit into one dominion. At one period it seemed that the divergent elements in this confederation would scarcely cohere. But now every year seems to make the consciousness of our unity, as a people, stronger, so that nothing short of a political earthquake could separate what God has so manifestly joined together.

We think of our Dominion as now complete. In one sense it is, and in another it is not. In the strict sense it can never be regarded as complete until Newfoundland and its coast line extending so far to the north, take their place as the natural eastern frontier of our great Dominion. It is to be hoped that no petty parish politics will long prevent this consummation.

We need Newfoundland and Labrador and they need us.

The Dominion thus rounded out will be a noble heritage, worthy of any people and any church. What it may become we are only beginning to perceive.

Fifteen or twenty years ago, those who studied the future possibilities of the Dominion, did so with a considerable degree of apprehension. It seemed to them that its eastern and western portions were united by a cold, rocky and inhospitable region, incapable of settlement, extending from North Bay in the east to Thunder Bay in the west, making it possible for a small hostile force to land on the shores of Lake Superior and sever our Dominion into two portions.

But within a few years we have learned that north of this inhospitable frontier there lies a fertile clay belt extending from the head waters of the Ottawa across Ontario and into Keewatin. This region, which was unknown a few years since, is said to contain some sixteen millions of acres of good land, well wooded and rich in agricultural and mineral wealth, the future home of a large and prosperous population.

The fears which were reasonable a few years ago, are dispelled, for the Dominion no longer presents the appearance of an

overgrown insect nearly cut in two in the middle.

The Fathers of Confederation wisely deemed the Intercolonial Railway essential to the unification of the scattered provinces of the Dominion. The same consideration led to the construction of that great railway which now gives us access to the shores of the Pacific.

Sixty years ago, railways were scarcely introduced into British America. At that date there was not one mile of railway in operation in all Ontario. Now there are 8,000 miles of such roads, and the mileage is increasing year by year.

The separate provinces and territories were then almost inaccessible to each other. Now you can pass in all the comfort of palatial cars from ocean to ocean in less than a single week. And three additional transcontinental railways are pressing their way westward to assist in knitting together the outlying portions of our land and in giving its growing commerce access to the markets of the world.

Sixty-one years ago, when I came to study in Toronto, I selected the best mode of travelling then available, and it took me four nights and three days to get from Ottawa to Kingston by the Rideau Canal, and nearly twenty-four hours longer to reach Toronto by steamer. Now we can

travel from Ottawa to Toronto in about eight hours. In these early days, travellers seldom took long journeys by land if they could avoid it, for they had to study not only the length but the depth of the roads.

When I first saw it, Toronto was then, as now, the largest city in the Province. It had a population of about twenty thousand and had scarcely outgrown its earlier title, Muddy York. You know what sixty-one years have done for it.

It is said that Toronto, in the language of the aborigines, signifies *fulness*. A missionary, who formerly used to preach to the Credit Indians through an interpreter, told me that the word had very pleasant associations in his ear; for whenever he happened to refer to the fulness of Christ he heard his interpreter say *Toronto*. And it seems to me that it would be a happy thing for this city, were the abundant prosperity which God is pouring into its lap, linked, as it ever should be, with the higher fulness which is in Christ.

We can easily observe the marvellous advance made in Canada, during the past sixty years, but who can venture to forecast the future? Our territory is almost equal to that of Europe, and its natural resources scarcely inferior. Its immense area of unoccupied fertile lands is sufficient to sustain a vast population and to

produce an ample overplus to feed other nations. Its wealth in minerals, forests and fisheries, and its unrivalled commercial facilities, all bespeak for Canada a prosperous future.

It has already drawn to itself the attention of the civilized world, and immigrants from all parts of the earth are hastening to this land of promise.

In some quarters the speech of the people is becoming a very polyglot. Several years ago it was reported that twenty-seven languages were spoken by the children attending the public schools in the city of Winnipeg. We are, however, glad to know that in this influx of population from many lands, the Anglo-Saxon element greatly predominates, and that there is still a good prospect that the English language, literature and laws and Protestant Christianity will mould the future of our Dominion.

But, gathered as we are here in this school of sacred learning as Christian men and as Presbyterians, our thoughts naturally dwell more upon the ecclesiastical and theological movements of the years on which we look back.

The history of this college is worthy of remembrance. The disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843, was followed a year later by a similar division in Canada. Those who separated from the larger

body assumed the name of "the Presbyterian Church of Canada," but were commonly spoken of as "the Free Church." They had only about twenty-one ministers at first. The most of the theological students, however, adhered to them, and the body grew rapidly and ere long became the largest Presbyterian Church in Ontario and Quebec.

The necessity for a theological school to train a gospel ministry was felt from the beginning and steps were at once taken to meet the want. Professors were chosen and the college opened in the autumn of 1844 with some fourteen students.

For a time instruction was given in an Arts course as well as theology. But when the higher education of Ontario was put on a national basis, this feature of the work was discontinued as speedily as possible, and Knox College became a purely theological school. This institution has from the beginning, had on its staff a succession of able and devoted men. Gale, Esson, Rintoul, Burns, Willis, Geo. Paxton Young, Proudfoot, R. Y. Thomson, Halliday Douglas, Caven and Gregg were a gift to any college or to any church, and they left their impress on the men who studied under them.

When I entered Knox College as a student it had its abode in rented buildings, which now form the central part of the

Queen's Hotel on Front Street, and it had carried on its work in several earlier resting places of a more temporary character.

During these sixty-three years, this school has held on its way with gradually increasing strength and has trained more than eight hundred ministers for the Canadian church. Its graduates are now found in almost every province of the Dominion, and not a few of them have held high places in Canada, in the United States and in Great Britain, while others have done good work for the Master in the foreign field.

During all these years we may claim that Knox College has been a fountain of living waters. Whatever it may become in the future, its teaching in the past has been distinctly evangelical. It has held fast to the Reformed type of doctrine and neither its professors nor its students have felt that they needed to apologize for so doing.

In the preaching of its graduates, divine sovereignty and human freedom, the impotency of fallen man and the all-sufficiency of divine grace, have been presented side by side, and God has owned and blessed the message.

Sixty years ago there were three considerable Presbyterian churches in Ontario and Quebec "provoking one another," we hope "to love and good works," certainly stimulating each other to much activity in

caring for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But while these divisions had incidental benefits, which need not be denied, they were also attended with serious evils.

Where three bodies, one in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, are working side by side in the same field it is difficult to discover any good reason why they should not form one united phalanx and march to battle under the same banners.

The union in Nova Scotia, in 1860, of two sections of the Presbyterian Church, and the union, one year later in Ontario and Quebec, of the two corresponding bodies, led on to the larger union of 1875, which included the Presbyterianism of the whole Dominion. These unions were unquestionably the result of the growing conviction that there was no sufficient ground why churches so nearly identical, should not become visibly one.

When by the union of 1875 the fragments of Canadian Presbyterianism were united, the call to duty and the consciousness of strength seemed to come at the same time, and the Church threw itself into the work of home and foreign missions, with an energy and enthusiasm before unknown. Since that date the claims of our great Dominion have been responded to with a steadily growing liberality, and

Presbyterianism has not only held its own, but has gained upon the population of the country.

In 1875 there were in the Church 682 ministers and now, after thirty-one years, there are upwards of 1,500.

In 1875 there was one Presbytery with eight ministers west of the Great Lakes, now there are four Synods, twenty-two Presbyteries, and congregations and preaching stations almost numberless.

At the time of the union in 1875, there were sixteen missionaries in the foreign field, now there are 198. At the earlier date there were 150 home missionaries, last year there were reported 655. In 1875 there were 88,228 communicants, last year there were reported 253,397. The total contributions of the Church for all purposes in 1875 was \$982,672. The amount reported last year was \$3,351,284. Since 1875 the population of Canada has increased from about 4,000,000 to about 6,500,000, an increase of about 60 per cent.

It is evident that in outward growth the Presbyterian Church has, during this period, more than kept pace with the population of the country and that it has awakened in a marked manner to its responsibilities to the world.

Sixty years ago the Nova Scotian Church embarked in the foreign mission work. In

1846, two years after Knox College was founded, they sent out Dr. Geddie, their first missionary, to the foreign field. His success did much to kindle missionary enthusiasm in the Maritime Provinces.

But intercourse between the east and the west was, at that early period, so limited that Geddie's influence was for a long time little felt in Quebec and Ontario. It was not until 1875 that the whole Church began to gird itself seriously for the evangelization of the world. From that time down to the present the tide of interest in foreign work has been steadily rising.

In the same period the growth of home missions has advanced *pari passu*. The spirit which prompted the Church to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, did not allow it to forget to "begin at Jerusalem." We cannot always judge a church by outward appearances, but for this great change in the right direction, we are profoundly thankful.

We shall not venture to discuss the negotiations for union now pending between the Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians, or the still wider union at which some aim. To handle that subject in any satisfactory manner demands more time than we can devote to it, and perhaps more wisdom than we can command. These

union movements are certainly a sign of the times. There is much in them with which all Christian men naturally sympathize, and there are elements in these movements which we venture to think need our careful scrutiny.

The great work of the Canadian church at present is practical. It is not to indulge in speculative theology, but to give the gospel and its institutions to a new land. And we venture to think that one of the safeguards which has helped to preserve our theology pure and wholesome has been the concentration of the thought and energy of the Church on its great practical work, the salvation of souls and the up-building of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. No church which keeps these aims steadily before it is likely to wander far from the fundamental verities of the Christian system.

There has been, however, a measure of theological activity in the Presbyterian Church of Canada during the past sixty years, and such activity, within reasonable limits, we regard as a help rather than as a hindrance to the practical aims of the Christian church. At the commencement of the period, theological thought ran on entirely different questions than now engage attention. The topics which were then vehemently discussed are now seldom

mentioned and never seem to excite warm feeling.

The union of Church and State in its varied bearings was the burning question in these early days. It had in some form occasioned nearly all the divisions among Presbyterians in Great Britain and her colonies.

It is a remarkable fact that in the Presbyterian system what we may call the centripetal and the centrifugal forces are so nicely balanced that when it stands by itself it seems to be able to do its own work and preserve its visible unity. But when it enters into foreign alliances, whether they be civil or ecclesiastical, situations often arise where the strain becomes too great and a breach of the visible unity becomes inevitable. We wish some of our church historians would take the trouble to compare this line of thought with the history of the Presbyterian Church.

In those days we had three divisions in the Presbyterian camp, each of which held a different attitude towards the union of Church and State. The United Presbyterians were generally voluntaries and did not recognize as lawful the union of Church and State. Those who adhered to the Church of Scotland generally believed both theoretically and practically in such a union. The body to which I belonged may

be regarded as in what may be called the *intermediate state*. They held the lawfulness of the union of Church and State, including the endowment of the church by the State, and they hoped that in some good time coming that union would be realized on a satisfactory basis. Meantime, it was their duty to teach and preach the truth. They rejected endowments, however, when offered to them and trained their people to practical voluntaryism with much success. But if any minister did not come up to the standard of doctrine on the voluntary question he not only lost caste but was liable to be dealt with by the courts of the Church.

An illustration from history may be permitted: A young man who studied in this college in these early days, when he had completed his course and came before his Presbytery, was almost refused license because he was regarded as a little defective on that living question. After some lively discussion he was licensed, but he made a somewhat narrow escape. I am afraid, however, that some of the excellent fathers deemed the Presbytery rather unfaithful in letting him through the meshes of their net. The views of that probationer would probably be regarded as rather conservative in the present day. It may indicate to you that the theological world moves a little even in Canada, when I tell you that that

young man lives still, a young man no longer, and that his views though broadened out a little, are substantially unchanged, but he is now deemed sufficiently sound in the faith to be tolerated as the principal of the college in which he studied.

In these early days men held their views firmly and ministers adhered loyally to the system of doctrine embodied in the Confession of Faith, and showed a wholesome readiness to defend it. No doubt at times there were sharp passages at arms between Presbyterians and those who differed from them, but even when they buckled on their armour they did not forget to recognize as fellow Christians the evangelical brethren, whose views they controverted.

Whatever may be true of individuals, I do not think there has been any substantial change in the system of theology held by the Church which can be stated in words. We look at the truth from different angles, and lay emphasis on other points than we did sixty years ago.

And there has been an insensible adjustment of our views, due to the mellowing influence of time and to contact with the working creed of our fellow Christians. Co-operation, also, with others in good works, has done not a little to round off the angularities which at one time were

rather outstanding. We seem at times almost to have passed into a region where we see "all the angles of the strife slow rounding into calm."

But sometimes there may be a calm which precedes a storm. And there can be no question that views in reference to the Holy Scriptures have been advocated, on both sides of the Atlantic, which have filled intelligent Christians with deep anxiety. Whatever touches the authority of the Scriptures touches Christianity in a vital part.

It is clear that the critical views which have been taught can only be adequately met by a criticism more careful and thorough. The right of every man to think for himself on these questions should be freely acknowledged. It should also be conceded that it is his duty to follow his convictions at whatever cost, by their open proclamation in every way consistent with personal integrity and the pledges voluntarily given to the Church, but on the other hand it should be recognized that the Church has an equal right to judge for itself what is truth, and to decide what shall be taught in its colleges, or preached in its pulpits. The Christian church is a body which has a message to give to the world, and it cannot allow itself to be resolved into a mere debating club.

There are, no doubt, important differences among those who are usually ranked as Higher Critics. Some differ very little from ordinary Christians in their practical treatment of the Holy Scriptures, while others differ so little from unbelievers that it needs an expert to distinguish them.

It has been said that these classes differ chiefly in the degree of consistency with which they apply the underlying principles which they accept in common. Be that as it may, the difference should be recognized.

Doubtless there are difficulties connected with the Old Testament and to some extent also with the New. Almost any ancient book presents difficulties, which cause perplexity, and there are difficulties peculiar to the Scriptures. But where a book has such marks of divinity stamped upon it, and has made for itself such a record in the world as the Bible, it is not every unsolved difficulty or unanswered objection, which should warrant Christian men in thinking lightly of "the infallible truth and divine authority" of the sacred volume. Many of these difficulties may yet be cleared up, as others have been.

It should also be remembered that the difficulties and objections which are now supposed by some to demand a new view of the origin, authority and structure of the Scriptures, are largely those that did duty

in the deistic controversy, and were then answered to the satisfaction of Christians. And if they stood by themselves to-day they would to most men carry no greater weight. But unfortunately they do not now stand alone.

One of the outstanding features of the closing portion of the last sixty years is the prevalence of views which shut men up to the rejection of the ordinary conception of the Scriptures and prepares them to welcome anything which seems to militate against it, and to attach to difficulties and objections a weight, which I venture to think, is not due to their intrinsic character. The influence of a Pantheistic philosophy in leading men to reject the supernatural and to welcome a purely naturalistic account of the origin and structure of the Bible must be evident to all.

The wide acceptance also by men of science and others, in recent years, of the doctrine of evolution tends powerfully in the same direction. That doctrine is not necessarily inconsistent with Theism, and has been embraced by some excellent Christian men, but it renders those who accept it, in proportion to the extent of the evolution in which they believe, necessarily unwilling to recognize any manifestation of the supernatural.

Some of them, indeed, speak freely of the supernatural, but in their vocabulary

the word has a new signification. It means merely the moral and spiritual element in man and his works. But the moral and spiritual in man is the product of natural law, and is no more supernatural than any other element which results from the evolutionary process.

Evolution, as stated by Darwin in "The Origin of Species," did not exclude the direct forth-putting of the divine power to originate life in "the primordial form," from which he supposes "all organic beings" have sprung.

This mode of speech was probably regarded by him as a concession to popular prejudices. His followers have not all been equally careful. Some of them can see no point either in time or in the evolutionary process at which, where nothing was, something by the fiat of a personal God came to be. They seem to know nothing of an absolute beginning. Evolution is with them "the method of creation." Man in all his parts was so produced. Mind, morals, religion, Christianity and all the sublime heroisms of missionary effort are the product of evolution. The Scriptures are the natural outcome of the religious nature of the men who wrote them. Their authors may have been somewhat wiser or better than we, but it was a difference only in degree.

When Christian men accept evolution as the correct account of the history of the universe they can scarcely avoid reconstructing their views of the Bible to suit their hypothesis. The change wrought within half a century in scientific thought by the writings of Darwin has few parallels in history. At the present day men of science not only admit the unity of the human race, but that all organic beings may have come from "one primordial form." Before Darwin, men of the first rank as scientists, like Agassiz, denied the unity of the human race. He held that there are eight centres of creation, each of which had a distinct race of men. Jacquinot held that there are three races of men. Morton maintained that there are twenty-two families of mankind. Pickering said that there was no choice but between one and eleven races. And Luke Burke, last but not least, asserted there are sixty-three distinct varieties of men.

And in these days, which I still remember, there were authors not a few, of the Nott and Gliddon type, who used these scientific speculations with the utmost confidence to overthrow all faith in the Bible.

These scientific opinions are now dead and buried, and well-nigh forgotten, but the Bible lives still.

If this retrospect has any lessons for us it seems to teach that we should not be in too great haste to adjust our views of the Bible to current scientific speculations, or too sure that these speculations will prove a sufficient buttress to sustain otherwise untenable opinions. For before half a century has run its course these scientific opinions may be discredited, and almost forgotten.

And we venture to think that scientists themselves are beginning to waver somewhat in their views in reference to evolution.

Certain it is the doctrine has never attained the status of *science*. Cautious thinkers who favor it assign it only the position of a *working hypothesis*, which may possibly be established, when all the facts are ascertained. All that learned and laborious research could do to invest this theory with a high degree of probability, Darwin did for his view of the origin of species, but he did not claim to have established it by proof.

There are two things, one or both of which are necessary to sustain this hypothesis, neither of which Darwin candidly admits has been discovered. These are: (1) Connecting links in co-existing nature between different species. We should expect to find transition forms by which we

might pass almost imperceptibly from one species to another. These are confessedly wanting. Darwin thinks that the original stock has perished, and only the fittest survive. Be that as it may, the evidence has not survived.

(2) We should expect to find these transition forms in the fossiliferous rocks which record the history of by-gone ages. But they are not found there. It is said that only a small portion of these rocks have been examined, and when the work is completed these forms may be discovered. Meanwhile Darwin admits they have not been found. Nor has any subsequent investigator been more successful than the founder of this school.

Evolution still remains a mere working hypothesis by which scientific men are largely guided in their investigations.

Drummond certainly is not warranted in calling it "the story of creation, as told by those who know it best," or "a general name for the history of the steps by which the world came to be what it is."

Much is lacking to sustain such claims. Evolution cannot account for an *absolute beginning* of anything. It cannot account for the origin of life, which always comes from life. And there are many changes subsequent to the introduction of life of which it supplies no explanation.

This survey reminds us that the passing years bring us face to face with varied and difficult problems to exercise our minds and to test our faith, but these problems speak to us of no insecurity in the foundations of our faith. There need be no fear for an ultimate conflict between science and the Bible, but it is quite possible that hypotheses which now flourish like a green bay-tree may wither and pass away, while God's Word written shall abide for ever.

